AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

1. (Currently Amended) A process for preparing an ionic compound comprising at least one cation containing a quaternary sp^2-hybridized nitrogen atom, which comprises

   a) reacting a compound ~~containing a double-bonded nitrogen atom~~ comprising an imidazole ring with a dialkyl sulfate with participation of both alkyl groups of the dialkyl sulfate to give an ionic compound containing sulfate anions, and

   b) if appropriate, subjecting the ionic compound obtained in step a) to an anion exchange.

2. (Cancelled)

3. (Previously Presented) The process according to claim 1, wherein the ionic compound obtained comprises at least one anion X^{n-} in which n is an integer corresponding to the valence of the anion and which is selected from among SO_4^{2-}, HSO_4^-, NO_2^-, NO_3^-, CN^-, OCN^-, NCO^-, SCN^-, NCS^-, PO_4^{3-}, HPO_4^{2-}, $H_2PO_4^-$, $H_2PO_3^-$, HPO_3^{2-}, BO_3^{3-}, $(BO_2)_3^{3-}$, $[BF_4]^-$, $[BCl_4]^-$, $[B(C_6H_5)_4]^-$, $[PF_6]^-$, $[SbF_6]^-$, $[AsF_6]^-$, $[AlCl_4]^-$, $[AlBr_4]^-$, $[ZnCl_3]^-$, dichlorocuprates(I) and (II), CO_3^{2-}, HCO_3^-, F^-, $(CF_3\text{-}SO_3)^-$, R'_3SiO^-, $R'\text{-}SO_3^-$ and $[(R'\text{-}SO_2)_2N]^-$, where R' is alkyl, cycloalkyl or aryl.

Claims 4-7 (Cancelled)

8. (Previously Presented) The process according to claim 1, wherein the reaction in step a) is carried out at a temperature of at least 60°C.

9. (Currently Amended) The process according to claim 1, wherein the molar ratio of the compound ~~containing a double-bonded nitrogen atom~~ comprising an imidazole ring to the dialkyl sulfate is at least 2:1.

10. (Previously Presented) The process according to claim 1, wherein the reaction in step a) is carried out in an organic solvent, in water or in a mixture thereof.

11. (Original) The process according to claim 10, wherein the solvent comprises at least 30% by volume of water.

12. (Previously Presented) The process according to claim 1, wherein the reaction in step a) is carried out in the presence of an inert gas.

13. (Previously Presented) The process according to claim 1, wherein the dialkyl sulfate is dimethyl sulfate or diethyl sulfate.

14. (Previously Presented) The process according to claim 1, wherein the process steps a) and b) are carried out in the absence of halide ions.

15. (Previously Presented) The process according to claim 1, wherein the exchange of the sulfate anion in step b) is effected by transprotonation with H_2SO_4, reaction with a metal salt, ion exchange chromatography or a combination thereof.

16. (Original) The process according to claim 15, wherein the reaction with the metal salt is carried out in a solvent from which a metal sulfate formed from the metal of the metal salt and the sulfate anion crystallizes out.

17. (Withdrawn) A halide-free and monoalkylsulfate-free salt of the general formula I

$$b\ B^{m+}\ x\ X^{n-} \quad (I)$$

where

B^{m+} is an m-valent cation containing at least one quaternary sp^2-hybridized nitrogen atom,

X^{n-} is an n-valent anion,

b and x are integers ≥ 1, with the proviso that (b times m) = (x times n).

18. (Cancelled)

19. (Cancelled)

20. (Previously Presented) The process according to claim 1, wherein the reaction in step a) is carried out at a temperature in the range from 100 to 220°C.

21. (Previously Presented) In a process for the preparation of components for pharmaceutical preparations wherein the improvement comprises using the salt as defined in claim 17.

22. (Previously Presented) In a process for the preparation of ionic liquids wherein the improvement comprises using the salt as defined in claim 17 as an intermediate in the preparation of ionic liquids.